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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide insight into employer participation in Georgia youth apprenticeship programs that offer work experience and learning at the work site. Data were gathered through a survey sent to a random sample of 206 employers, of the 450 employers involved in youth apprenticeship programs in the state. Analysis of the 121 responses resulted in the following information: (1) employers of all sizes and structures participated in the program; (2) most of the apprenticeships were in the business, marketing, and information management or technical and engineering career focus areas; (3) participating businesses employed an average of two youth apprentices and paid the students an average hourly rate of $5.18, with the hourly rate ranging from $3 to $10; (4) businesses cited lack of work as the main reason for not expanding their role in providing apprenticeships; (5) a majority of the employers were in the program for the first time and chose to participate for one of two reasons---to perform a community service and support the local school system or to recruit and train skilled employees for the future; (6) employers generally regarded the youth employees as productive; (7) most employers assigned a workplace mentor to youths, rotated them through assignments, and had a formal evaluation process; and (8) the schools were less effective in integrating the school-based portion of the program with the work-based portion through training agreements and training plans. The study cautioned that most of the youth apprenticeship programs in Georgia have been in operation for less than 2 years and it may be too early to draw conclusions about employer involvement, but that more research on these issues should be conducted in the future. (KC)

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Research Brief

Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education
Division of Educational Support Services

Employer Involvement in Georgia Youth Apprenticeship Programs

Employers are expected to be and must be full partners in the organization and operation of a youth apprenticeship program. These firms hiring youth apprentices are responsible for providing the work-based learning component of the program, yet little is known about employers who participate in the youth apprenticeship program. This study was designed to provide insight on employer participation in youth apprenticeship programs that offer work experience and learning at the work site.

Introduction

Almost all major education reform proposals of the 1980s used, as part of their rationale, the need for America to compete effectively in the international market place by preparing highly qualified workers. Yet, none of those proposals was centered on the goal of relating education and work more effectively.

With publication of *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages* (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990), education was challenged to change its structure and operations. The basic reasoning behind this reform lies in the difficulties recent high school graduates seeking to enter the labor market have in making the transition from schooling to employment contrasted with their counterparts in other industrialized nations (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1991; America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages, 1990). In the *School-to-Work Connection* (1990), Marc Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy, is quoted as saying "The U.S. system for transition-ing from school-to-work is the worst in the industrialized world."

Recently enacted federal legislation, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, has responded to these concerns. This legislation offers states and localities great latitude in designing systems to connect school-to-work. Work-based learning is a centerpiece of this educational reform legislation and more specifically youth apprenticeship programs are seen as an important program in linking school-based and work-based education.

Inspired by Germany's "dual system," which places more than 60 percent of 16-year olds in the workplaces to learn a trade, youth apprenticeships have been established in more than a dozen states, and in many states legislated. Typically, youth apprentices would make a three-to-four year commitment to a career area and an employer spanning the last two years of high school and the following two years. Their hours on-the-job might rise from twenty per week in year one to full time in year four, and they would be paid. Teachers and employers would teach basic skills using workplace applications and specific technical skills of an industry. Students would graduate with a high school diploma, significant work experience, academic credits toward an associate degree and a skills certificate within a specific industry.

In 1992, the governor of Georgia initiated and the General Assembly passed legislation establishing the legal basis for developing youth apprenticeship programs in the state. The legislation directed the Georgia Department of Education to develop policies, procedures and standards necessary to implement the program for all state school systems. The legislation further provides for collaborative relationships in developing this program with the Georgia Departments of Labor and Technical and Adult Education.

Youth apprenticeship offers students both school-based and work-based educational experiences. It combines structured, paid work and

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training on-the-job with related classroom instruction. The emphasis is on contextual, real-world learning through workplace experiences. Effective youth apprenticeship programs require extensive coordination between employers, schools, labor, and government because of its high academic standards and high-skill career opportunities. Some of the defining characteristics of youth apprenticeship are:

- employers active participation;
- integration of work-based and school based learning;
- integration of academic and vocational learning;
- secondary and post secondary linkages; and
- award of an occupational skill certificate.

To build an effective youth apprenticeship program, the involvement of employers is essential. Employers are responsible for creating a program of structured workplace learning that includes workplace mentoring, instruction in general workplace competencies, and broad instruction in different aspect of a particular industry.

Procedures

Employers are expected to be and must be full partners in the organization and operation of a youth apprenticeship program. These firms hiring youth apprentices are responsible for providing the work-based learning component of the program, yet little is known about employers who participate in the youth apprenticeship program. This study was designed to provide insight on employer participation in youth apprenticeship programs that offer work experience and learning at the work site.

Little information is currently available on firms that are participating in youth apprenticeship programs within the state. A review of past research and literature that focused on issues surrounding employer participation in work-based learning programs was limited.

An advisory group composed of five youth apprenticeship coordinators provided guidance on the development of the survey instrument used in this study. The basic questions examined were: (1) What are the characteristics of participating employers? (2) What factors impact an employer's decision to participate? (3) What are the benefits to the employer for participating? and (4) What is their role in developing work-based learning experiences for students? Upon completion of the development of the survey instrument, a pre-test survey was conducted and then necessary modifications were made to the survey instrument.

During the 1995-1996 academic year a total of 54 consortiums (composed of secondary schools and post secondary institutions) were engaged in various stages of implementing a youth apprenticeship program within the state. Each consortium was asked to provide a listing of participating employers who could be included in the survey sample. A listing of 450 employers was provided. The study was based on a random sample of 206 employers. To obtain this sample, the names of all employers were put into an alphabetical list. The names on this list were then assigned consecutive numbers. By the use of a table of numbers the sample was selected.

An introductory letter, explaining the purpose of the survey and soliciting participation, was mailed to each employer in the sample. Survey instruments were mailed during the month of January 1996. One hundred twenty-one of the 206 survey instruments were returned after the initial mailing and a follow-up procedure, yielding a return rate of 59 percent.

Results

The returned surveys were coded, checked for accuracy and entered into a data base for analysis. In this study descriptive statistics and theme-content analysis were utilized.

Characteristics of Participating Employers

Employers were asked to provide a descriptive information concerning their business to establish a profile of the participating businesses. Businesses and industries were classified into the six career focus areas established for the state of Georgia.

The career focus areas in Georgia and occupations related to the focus area are: Art and Humanities (includes occupations in fine arts, journalism, languages, music, publishing, tv/radio/film, theater, visual arts/graphic design); Business, Marketing and Information Management (includes occupations in accounting, business information systems, entrepreneurship, insurance, personnel, retail, sales); Environmental and Agricultural Science (includes occupations in aquatics/aquaculture, biotechnology, earth or marine sciences, environmental technology, forestry, horticulture, husbandry/wildlife); Health and Medical (includes occupations in allied health services, dental health, medicine/physician, nursing); Human Services (includes occupations in child care, culinary arts/food service, education, government,

hospitality/tourism/travel, interior design, law and law enforcement, social and family services); and Technical/Engineering (includes occupations in aerospace, auto technology/ design, computer programming/ hardware technology, construction, electronics, manufacturing, metalworking/machining, telecommunications, transportation).

Two career focus areas accounted for more than half of the population; Business, Marketing and Information Management (29.8%) and Technical Engineering (37.2%). The remaining business and industries were in either the Human Services area (16.5%) or the Health and Medical career area (16.5%). No employers were identified with either the Art and Humanities or Environmental and Agricultural Science career focus areas.

Employers of all sizes and structures participated in this study. The number of full-time workers employed in the businesses ranged from 4,000 to 0 with an average of 234 and part-time employees ranged from 250 to 0 with an average of 12. Businesses were classified in their structure as "part of corporation that includes more than one operating unit of the same type of business" (32.2%); "the sole operating unit in a corporation" (19%); "family owned" and "privately owned" (14.9% each); with the re-maining business classified as either "part of a conglomerate that includes more than one facility and more than one type of business" (8.3%); or a "local education agency" (9.1%). As part of the survey, employers were asked about annual changes in employment levels. The vast majority of employers (69.4%) reported less than 10% annual employee turnover rate; and just less than half (47.1%) noted an annual employee turnover rate of less than 5%.

Participating businesses employed an average of two youth apprentices and paid the students an average hourly rate of $5.18 which is above the minimum wage rate. The range of hourly rate was from $3.00 to $10.00. A large number of employers (65.5%) have established a graduated pay increase for youth apprenticeship students. Graduated pay increases were provided to students for their knowledge and performance on the job as well as for the length of time with the business. A small number of businesses (6.7%) did not remunerate the youth apprentices for their work-based learning. All of the businesses falling into this category were either in the Health and Medical or Human Services career industry areas.

When queried as to the reasons why the business or industry does not expand its involvement in the youth apprenticeship, a large majority of the employers (61.98%) cited that there is not enough work to take on additional students. Issues that are frequently raised in the literature about expansion of the youth apprenticeship program—child labor laws and health and safety laws—were of concern to relatively few employers in the Georgia study.

A majority of the businesses and industries in the sample reported they weren't involved in any other capacity of the youth apprenticeship program or the schools. Of employers who had other types of involvement, the most frequently mentioned (n=21) was that as being a participant on the advisory group or committee for the youth apprenticeship program.

Employers' Decision to Participate

A majority of employers (71.9%) were involved with the youth apprenticeship program for the first time. The two predominate reasons cited as why employers chose to participate in the program were to perform a community service and support the local school system or to recruit and train skilled employees for the future.

Student productivity on the job was cited by a vast majority of employers (80.2%) as the reason they would continue to participate in the youth apprenticeship program. When considering costs of hiring youth apprenticeship students compared with their productivity, employers reported that they either break about even (62.7%) or make money (32.7%). Youth apprenticeship students averaged approximately nineteen hours per week at the work site.

Role in Work-Based Learning

School supervised work-based learning is characterized by identified quality control factors that differentiate it from work experience. Quality control factors that apply to work-based learning are training agreements, training plans, workplace mentors, rotation of students to different positions or tasks, a formal method of evaluation of the students' work performance, and regular workplace visits by the coordinator.

Employers reported that a workplace mentor had been assigned to the youth apprentices (85.9%); that students were rotated through different positions or tasks periodically (71.1%); and there was a formal method for evaluating the student's work performance for the school (75.2%). Responses from the employer sample indicated that there was less attention paid to the signing of training agreements between the school and employer (44.6%) which outlined the specific responsibilities of each party and that approximately half of the employers and schools had developed a training plan for the youth apprentices (51.2%) detailing the specific tasks that a student would be engaged in at the workplace.

Responses from the employer sample indicated that the youth apprenticeship coordinator visited the work site less than once per month (73.7%). Although this is viewed as a low visitation rate of a youth apprenticeship coordinator, a majority of the employers where satisfied with the process for resolving problems that may arise with a youth apprenticeship student's work performance or behavior (82%).

Conclusions

The information gathered from the employers in this sample provides a starting point for understanding how youth apprenticeship and other work-based learning programs operate and how they are perceived by employers. Many of the findings from this study confirm the 1994 research of the National Center for the Educational Quality of the Workforce (EQW) on school to work programs.

Specifically the conclusions from the study of Georgia employers include:

employers are satisfied with the quality of students in the youth apprenticeship program and believe that they are productive workers that are contributing to the business.

employers commit to participating in the youth apprenticeship program as a community service, but there is also a persuasive belief that recruitment and training of a skilled workforce for the future is another motivation for participation.

employers cited that the lack of enough work is a major reason that they were unable to expand their participation in the youth apprenticeship program and that prevailing issues such as child labor and health and safety were not affecting their decision to expand support.

employers are active in engaging the students in the workplace by providing mentors and a rotation of jobs or duties; but the schools seem to be less effective in integrating the school-based portion of the program with the work-based through the use of training agreements and training plans.

A majority of the youth apprenticeship programs in Georgia have been in operation less than two years and it may be too early to draw major conclusions about large-scale employee involvement in these programs based on their relatively short life-span. But as the programs develop and mature, employer-focused issues should be documented.

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